

A young girl with dark hair and a small red earring is shown in profile, blowing on a dandelion seed head. She is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. The background is a bright, sunny field of green grass with many dandelion seeds floating in the air. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

*Helping Communities Achieve  
A Sustainable Future*

2008 DRAFT REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



# *Executive Summary*

## **REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: CHARTING A PATH FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE**

The Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) is a problem-solving document that directly responds to what we've learned about Southern California's challenges through the annual State of the Region report card. It responds to SCAG's Regional Council directive in the 2002 Strategic Plan to develop a holistic plan that lays out a plan for defining and solving our housing, traffic, water, air quality, and other regional challenges.

The RCP sets a path forward in two key ways. First, it ties together SCAG's role in transportation, land use, and air quality planning and says we need to do more than we're doing today. For example, while the RCP is based on the growth management framework of the Compass Blueprint, it further promotes environmental policies that help to "green" the region and lay the groundwork for a more robust 2012 update of the Regional transportation Plan. Second, it recommends key roles and responsibilities for public and private sector stakeholders and invites them to implement reasonable policies that are within their control.

This is a proactive, big-picture advisory plan that defines what a livable, sustainable, successful region looks like and challenges us to push through barriers. The RCP describes what our region could look like if current trends continue, defines a vision for a healthier region, and recommends an Action Plan that could get us there by 2035. By balancing resource conservation, economic vitality, and quality of life, it lays out a long-term planning framework that shows how we can respond to growth and infrastructure challenges in a comprehensive way.

The RCP recognizes that there are many ways to address the region's challenges. As such, while the RCP recommends solutions by calling for more integrated resource planning, it does not mandate them. For example, local governments are asked to consider this Plan's recommendations in General Plan updates, municipal code amendments, design guidelines, and other implementing actions. However, there are undoubtedly alternative means to the same ends. The key is to begin talking about what the challenges are, defining success, and implementing solutions.



**FAST FACTS***The Consequences of Inaction*

If these projected regional, national, and international changes continue to unfold, our region will go through potentially profound changes. There are potentially troubling consequences if we fail to act now:

**Land Use and Housing**

- Lack of new housing in existing neighborhoods could result in increased land consumption in fringe areas.

**Transportation**

- As roadways get more congested, traffic speeds could drop to an average of 28 miles per hour during rush hour.

**Solid Waste**

- Exporting waste to desert areas and beyond increase the economic and environmental costs of waste management.

## *The RCP is a problem-solving document that responds to what we've learned about Southern California's challenges through the State of the Region.*

**The RCP is being developed to:**

- Respond to the SCAG Regional Council's direction to develop a comprehensive plan that looks at environmental, social, and economic issues in concert and recommends policies that SCAG, local governments, and other stakeholders should consider.
- Inform local, subregional, and county economic and resource plans that are often limited by geography or scope. For example, a county-wide resource plan for open space may fail to recognize the habitat value of linking to adjacent county open space plans.
- Help meet federal transportation planning requirements that call for more integrated resource planning, particularly increased integration of environmental concerns into transportation plans through expanded consultation.
- Improve guidance to local governments through more comprehensive regional input into the development of local General Plans and major development through the region's Intergovernmental Review process.
- Provide a regional response and strategy for meeting climate change mandates that call for dramatic reductions in greenhouse gases.

- Offer a comprehensive, integrated policy plan that helps position Southern California to get its fair share of revenue from federal and state funding programs, such as the traffic, housing, water, and parks infrastructure bonds approved in 2006.
- Help stakeholders make the most of their limited resources by highlighting priority policies for future implementation that maximize benefits both locally and regionally.

Ultimately, the RCP sets the stage for regional dialogue and initiatives that translates into action. Success of the RCP or any resource plan depends on the region's ability to agree on our challenges, evaluate solutions, and implement change through consensus. As the council of governments for Southern California, SCAG is uniquely positioned to work with its membership to take a leadership role in sustainability planning—integrated planning that meets our needs without squandering resources for the future. As the region's metropolitan planning organization, SCAG can help prioritize federal and state funds for programs that support the RCP's vision and outcomes.

To that end, SCAG plans proposes to update the RCP on a regular basis in concert with the Regional Transportation Plan to reflect changes in legislation, technology, policy, and other variables.



## ASSESSING OUR CHALLENGES

Southern California is witnessing historic change at the global, national, and regional level. As our world continues to change in sometimes dramatic ways, our built-out region is increasingly faced with tougher policy decisions that will shape the way our region will look like in 25 years if we don't change the way we do business:

- Our region's population continues to increase and challenges us to find better ways to grow. We need to work within the region and with our partners in Kern County to the north and San Diego County to the south to address growth issues that threaten our quality of life. Failure to do so threatens the open spaces that provide critical wildlife habitat.
- Making a real dent in traffic congestion is getting tougher and increasingly more expensive for everyone. Our difficult housing market and the "drive until you qualify" phenomenon have doomed more and more of us to mega-commutes through choked freeways and streets. Without solutions, traffic speeds on freeways will slow to 28 mph within 25 years. Major changes to the way we move people and freight must begin now.
- After decades of steady progress, our air quality improvements have leveled off as growth has begun to offset the technological advancements that have served us until now. Today, we face an air quality crisis, with more than 5,000 premature deaths from fine particulate mat-

ter. We must respond to more stringent air quality standards for PM<sub>2.5</sub> and even unregulated smaller pollutants called nanoparticles by reducing our reliance on diesel and other petroleum-based, combustion engines.

- The limits of our energy supply are increasingly tested every summer with constant threats of rolling blackouts. We are dependent on imported petroleum, natural gas, and coal, which account for 85 percent of our energy use. As we question the long term viability of a petroleum-based energy future, we can't afford to delay to explore real options to combustion-based energy sources.
- Our water supplies are increasingly threatened by pollution and growth is often limited by whether there's adequate supply. The quality of our surface and groundwater supplies is equally important and must be protected through better management practices.
- As our demographics continue to change, our economy continues to become more service- and technology-oriented, with manufacturing outsourced to other regions and other countries. Over time, our region needs to find a balance that promotes regional economic sustainability through promotion of local industries while recognizing its important link to the global economy.
- We have to rethink our current waste management approaches and realize that waste is the result of the inefficient use of our limited, natural resources. Our region



**FAST FACTS***The Consequences of Inaction***Energy**

- Estimates indicate up to 100 more days per year with temperatures above 90° F in LA.
- Higher temperatures and lower snowpack due to global warming could reduce hydropower generation, reducing California's in-state power production by 5 percent.

**Air Quality**

- With a potential 3 to 10.5° F rise in temperature due to climate change, extremely hot days could double to 72 per year.
- Higher temperatures could hinder our air quality goals resulting in 85 % more days conducive to ozone formation in the LA Area.

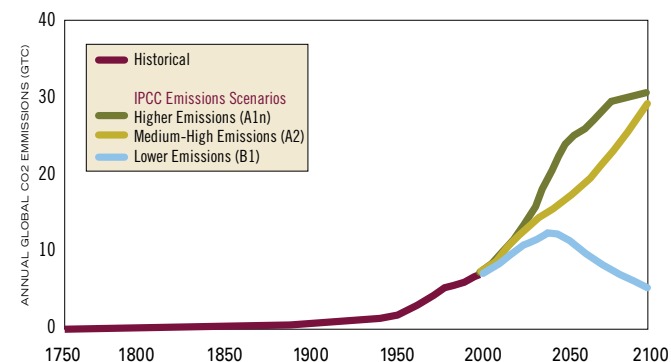
## *The RCP is action-oriented, but does not mandate requirements.*

generates over 80 million tons of trash each year. Burying the problem in landfills does not make it go away. We need to step up our efforts on reducing waste, re-use of materials, recycling, and developing alternative technologies.

In addition, forces on the national and international scale are impacting our region:

- **Climate change.** The body of scientific evidence shows that our global climate is heating up at unprecedented rates that threaten life as we know it. The vast Southern California region has contributed to the highest CO<sub>2</sub> emissions levels in recorded history (see below). This threatens to impact all aspects of our communities, whether it's reduced water supplies, habitat loss, increased air pollution, or public health impacts. The secondary effects of climate change are almost as troubling; for example, hotter cities need more cooling, which increases power plant usage that contributes further to the vicious cycle of greenhouse gases.
- **Energy uncertainty.** As the peak of the world's petroleum production rate is reached, there could be profound consequences to our region's economy. Southern California's transportation, agricultural and industrial systems are highly dependent on inexpensive oil. Any production decline and resulting price increases will have negative implications for the global and regional economy; the severity will depend on the rate of decline

and the linked increases in prices and our ability to find alternatives for petroleum.

**Historical and Projected CO<sub>2</sub>**

Source: "Our Changing Climate: Assessing the Risks to California". A summary report from the California Climate Change Center.

- **Global economy.** If Southern California were a country, we'd be the 15th largest economy in the world. In this globalized economy, our region is increasingly susceptible to outside influences like international economic downturns that pose further challenges.

These challenges call for action, because the consequences of inaction are potentially profound (see the "Fast Facts" sidebar). This need for action is all the more urgent because all of these issues are tightly linked. For example, failure to address energy supply issues has direct and indirect impacts on air quality and public health.

## FORMING A VISION AND IMPLEMENTING AN ACTION PLAN

The RCP is a structured policy framework that links broad visionary principles to an action plan that moves the region towards balanced goals. It is based on the following vision and guiding principles:

### RCP Vision

To foster a Southern California region that addresses future needs while recognizing the interrelationship between economic prosperity, natural resource sustainability, and quality of life. Through measured performance and tangible outcomes, the RCP serves as both an action plan for implementation of short-term strategies and a call to action for strategic, long-term initiatives that are guided by the following Guiding Principles for sustaining a livable region.

### RCP Guiding Principles

1. **Improve mobility for all residents.** Improve the efficiency of the transportation system by strategically adding new travel choices to enhance system connectivity in concert with land use decisions and environmental objectives.
2. **Foster livability in all communities.** Foster safe, healthy, walkable communities with diverse services,

strong civic participation, affordable housing and equal distribution of environmental benefits.

3. **Enable prosperity for all people.** Promote economic vitality and new economies by providing housing, education, and job training opportunities for all people.
4. **Promote sustainability for future generations.** Promote a region where quality of life and economic prosperity for future generations are supported by the sustainable use of natural resources.

The RCP looks at nine key areas of public policy that are linked closely to these guiding principles (list nine chapters in sidebar). Each chapter is organized into three sections:

- **Goals.** Each goal will help define how sustainability is defined for that resource area.
- **Outcomes.** These focus on quantitative targets that define progress toward meeting the RCP's Goals. Where possible, they are clearly defined (e.g., a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 2007 levels), capable of being monitored with existing or reasonably foreseeable resources, and have a strong link to sustainability goals.
- **Action Plan.** This critical part of the RCP lays out a comprehensive implementation strategies that recommends how the region can systematically move to meet the RCP's quantitative Outcomes and achieve its Goals,



**FAST FACTS***The Consequences of Inaction***Open Space and Habitat**

- Invasive plants and weeds could shift and alter competition patterns with native plants, potentially wiping out a number of endangered species.
- 60 to 80% of existing plant populations could be “phased out” resulting in less biodiversity,

**Economy**

- Transportation, agricultural and industrial systems depend on inexpensive oil, declines in petroleum production and resulting severe price increases will impact our economy.
- Global warming will reduce the quality and quantity of certain agricultural products; a key driver of the California economy.

## *Success depends on the region’s ability to agree on our challenges, evaluate solutions and implement change through consensus.*

Guiding Principles, and Vision. Each Action Plan contains:

**Constrained Policies.** This includes a series of recommended near-term, feasible policies that stakeholders should consider for implementation. For example, the RCP will call on SCAG to adopt certain policies that reflect its role as a planning agency, council of governments, and metropolitan planning organization. The RCP also recommends potential policies for consideration by local governments and other key stakeholders. Clear policies will improve the Intergovernmental Review process and help SCAG and local governments assess the consistency of local projects to the RCP.

**Strategic Initiatives.** This encompasses longer-term strategies that require significant effort to implement but are necessary to achieve the RCP’s desired Goals and Outcomes. Most of these initiatives are not constrained and will require political will, enabling legislation, new funding sources, and other key developments to become a reality. In most cases, this tier of strategies is the key to achieving the region’s sustainability Goals and Outcomes.

The RCP identifies policies that represent best practices or address needed reform for each resource area. However, public agencies and local stakeholders must find ways to evaluate and prioritize the best options in resource-constrained environments where funding is limited.

**SETTING PRIORITIES**

Because there is no silver bullet that can solve our region’s array of challenges, our region is faced with many policy options that should be evaluated before tough decisions are made. There are a variety of performance measures that can be used to rank policy options, such as cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit ratio, and environmental benefits.

The RCP looks at the body of recommended policies and highlights those that can produce the most benefits across resource areas. In doing so, the RCP provides a framework for local decision-making that helps advance those policies that “provide multiple benefits for the price of one.” The RCP’s priority policies are based on the following qualitative criteria:

- Potential for direct and indirect benefits over multiple resource areas.
- Potential to address other policy objectives, including public health and environmental justice.
- Potential to respond to climate change concerns and mandates.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

As an advisory document, the RCP identifies potential policies that the public and private sector should consider in its planning and daily operations. The RCP reaffirms the institutional roles that SCAG, local governments, resource organizations,



and the private sector have in resource planning and program. To that end, the RCP recommends the following roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders:

- **SCAG.** As a council of governments, SCAG can take a leadership role by working with its member jurisdictions to promote sound planning policies through guidance, financial incentives, and other means. The RCP continues an ongoing dialogue with 187 local governments to develop consensus about how Southern California thinks globally and regionally and acts locally. In its role as a metropolitan planning organization, SCAG can also help advance integrated policies through its funding decisions.
- **Local governments.** Local jurisdictions have the land use authority to promote balanced growth and other local initiatives that promote integrated planning. In their capacity as major employers, cities also can set an example in their communities by adopting proactive policies that reduce waste, promote energy efficiency, and address other goals.
- **Transportation commissions.** With their role in planning and programming transportation projects, commissions can modify their criteria to help promote integrated planning objectives. While mobility benefits will also be a critical factor, commissions can look at other environmental and social criteria to provide a

more balanced view of the benefits of their plans, programs, and projects.

- **Resource agencies and conservation groups.** These organizations work every day to promote better resource management, economic development, and other social and environmental policies and programs. The RCP offers these organizations the opportunity to discuss challenges and opportunities through a more regional approach.
- **Private sector.** Businesses are urged to take a proactive role in addressing the goals of the region through voluntary changes in their practices. Whether it's reducing consumer waste associated with product packaging or promoting greener building practices in new development, the private sector has a key role in promoting programs that are consistent with the RCP.
- **The public.** The long-term well-being of our region ultimately serves the needs of all of us, our kids, and future generations. Our decision-makers need to know that solving our environmental, economic, and quality of life problems is something worth working for.



## FAST FACTS

### *The Consequences of Inaction*

#### Water

- Increased temperatures would result in earlier annual snowmelt and increased rainfall in the mountains, leading to increased flood risks along major streams and rivers throughout the region.
- Sierra Nevada spring snowpack could reduce by as much 90 percent – a primary source of water for Southern California.
- Sea levels could rise from 1-3 feet by 2100 affecting water supply. The influx of saltwater would threaten the quality and reliability of major fresh water supply.

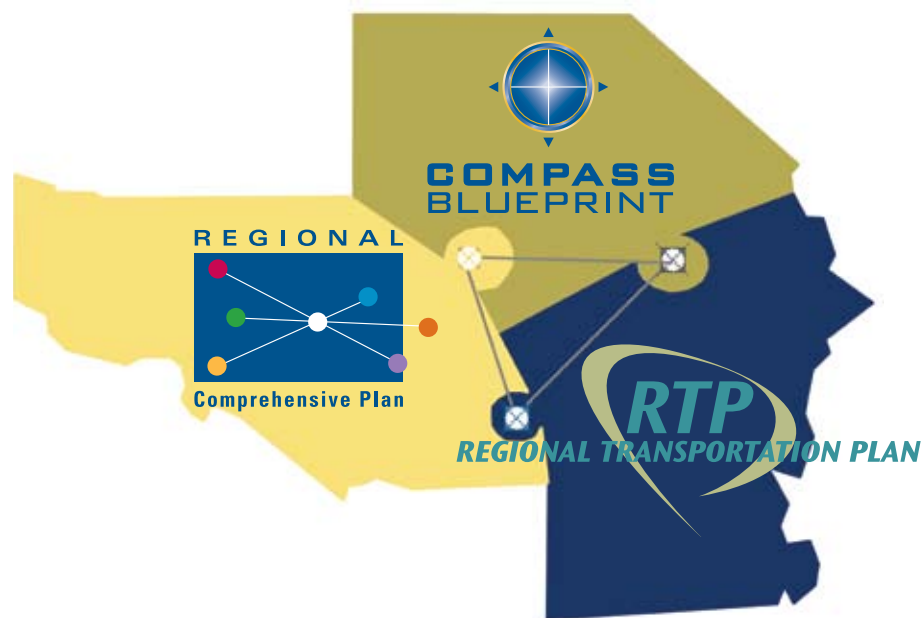
*The need for action is urgent, failure to address one issue can impact many other areas.*

## RELATIONSHIP OF RCP TO COMPASS BLUEPRINT AND THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

This integrated plan is closely tied to both SCAG's Compass Blueprint and Regional Transportation Plan. On one hand, the RCP complements the existing SCAG Compass Blueprint and the 2008 RTP. On the other, it also sets the direction for how both programs can evolve in the future.

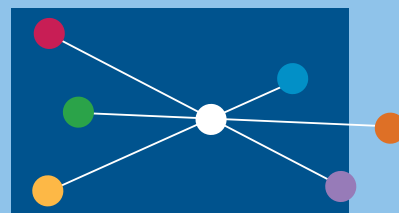
The RCP builds off the growth management framework of the Compass Blueprint by promoting natural resource policies that help "green" the region as we move toward more sustainable growth. However, it also calls for improved integration of Blueprint into the Regional Transportation Plan. Future transportation plans should better promote projects that are designed to serve Compass Blueprint areas that have or are anticipated to have more population and job opportunities. Similarly, the RCP incorporates the recommendations from the existing RTP but also clarifies the need for further action in the future to address federal and state mandates.

## THREE INTERRELATED PLANS





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**Comprehensive Plan**



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